

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-05 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05 TRSE-00 HA-05

OPR-02 A-01 SY-05 MCT-01 USSS-00 OC-06 CCO-00

ACDA-12 /129 W

-----115234 211346Z /40

R 211149Z DEC 77

FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9978

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 PRETORIA 6987

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, PINT, WA

SUBJECT: NAMIBIA: DISTURBANCE AT SWAPO MEETING

1. SUMMARY: SWAPO'S SECOND PUBLIC RALLY IN OVAMBO, AT ONDANGWA ON DEC. 16, ENDED IN VIOLENCE WHEN A GROUP OF PRO-TURNHALLE DEMONSTRATORS REPORTEDLY ATTEMPTED TO BREAK UP THE MEETING. IN THE ENSUING MELEE POLICE FIRED TEARGAS AND A NUMBER OF SWAPO SUPPORTERS WERE SLIGHTLY INJURED. WE HAVE RECEIVED WIDELY DIFFERING ACCOUNTS OF THE MEETING AND ITS AFTERMATH FROM SWAPO AND THE ADMINISTRATOR-GENERAL'S OFFICE. SWAPO IS USING THE INCIDENT TO SUPPORT ITS CLAIM THAT FREE ELECTIONS ARE IMPOSSIBLE WHILE SOUTH AFRICAN TROOPS REMAIN IN NAMIBIA. END SUMMARY.

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2. ON DEC. 16, SWAPO HELD A PUBLIC RALLY AT ONDANGWA, WHICH WAS THE SECOND SWAPO GATHERING IN OVAMBO SINCE THE BAN ON MEETINGS IN THE AREA WAS LIFTED IN OCTOBER. A CROWD ESTIMATED FROM 800 TO 8,000 BY GOVERNMENT AND SWAPO SOURCES RESPECTIVELY, ATTENDED, DESPITE MILITARY ROADBLOCKS WHICH RESULTED IN DELAYS FOR PERSONS TRAVELING TO THE RALLY. THE

MEETING STARTED AROUND NOON AND WAS ADDRESSED BY SWAPO MEMBERS AXEL JOHANNES, LUCIA HAMUTENYA, SKINNY HILUNDWA, AND REV. HENDRIK WITBOOI. AT ABOUT 4:00 P.M., DURING WITBOOI'S SPEECH, A GROUP OF TURNHALLE BACKERS REPORTEDLY ATTACKED THE SWAPO SUPPORTERS IN AN ATTEMPT TO BREAK UP THE GATHERING. IN THE RESULTING FIGHT, A NUMBER OF SWAPO SUPPORTERS WERE SAID TO HAVE BEEN HURT. ALL ACCOUNTS AGREE THAT THE POLICE FIRED TEARGAS TO DISPERSE THE CROWD.

3. ON DEC. 19, THE SWAPO NATIONAL EXECUTIVE RELEASED ITS VERSION OF THE INCIDENT, WHICH WAS GIVEN TO US BY TELEPHONE FROM SWAPO HEADQUARTERS IN WINDHOEK: QUOTE: THE REACIST SOUTH AFRICAN ARMED FORCES HAVE VIOLENTLY BROKEN UP AN ORDERLY SWAPO RALLY HELD AT OLUNO, A BLACK TOWNSHIP OF ONDANGWA IN NORTHERN NAMIBIA ON THE 16TH OF DEC. 1977. DESPITE STRONG RUMORS THAT AFTER THE HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL SWAPO RALLY AT OSHAKATI ON OCT. 9 OF THIS YEAR, THE OCCUPATION REGIME WAS BENT ON RESORTING TO VIOLENCE, A CROWD OF ABOUT 8,000 DEFIANT STRONG SUPPORTERS OF SWAPO ATTENDED. IN ORDER TO INTIMIDATE, HARASS, AND SCARE THE PEOPLE FROM ATTENDING THE SWAPO PUBLIC MEETING, THE SOUTH AFRICAN ARMY PUT UP ROAD BLOCKS WHERE CARS AND PEOPLE WERE THOROUGHLY SEARCHED FOR WEAPONS. QUEUES OF VEHICLES STRETCHING UP TO TWO KILOMETERS COULD BE SEEN AT MOST OF THESE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MILITARY ROAD BLOCKS. IN THIS HIGHLY TENSE ATMOSPHERE, THE S.A. POLICE SHIFTED THE ORIGINAL SITE TO THE ONE WHICH WAS IDEAL FOR THEIR PRE-PLANNED AGGRESSION. A WELL ORGANIZED GROUP OF ABOUT 20 TRIBAL SOLDIERS IN PLAIN CLOTHES WHO IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES AS "NDJOBA'S FIST." ARMED WITH THORNY PALM BRANCHES, HAND GRENADES AND RIFLES DID EVERYTHING IN THEIR POWER TO PROVOKE THE AUDIENCE. APART FROM THEIR ABUSIVE LANGUAGE, THESE SO-CALLED TURNHALLE-DEMONSTRATORS THREW SAND AMONG THE CROWD AND BEAT PEOPLE INDISCRIMINATELY WHILE A GROUP OF SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE IN SEVEN ANTI-LANDMINE VEHICLES STOOD BY SMILING SATISFACTORILY. WHEN THESE SO-CALLED DEMONSTRATORS REALIZED THAT THE AUDIENCE WAS PREPARED TO DEFEND ITSELF, THEY RAN BACK TO THEIR CAMP NEARBY. THEY RETURNED AFTER A WHILE IN FULL MILITARY DRESS AND ARMED. SHORTLY AFTER THE FIRST SPEAKER, COMRADE H. WITBOOI, THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SHOT AT THE CROWD WITH TEARGAS. THE TRIBAL SOLDIERS TOOK THIS AS A SIGN TO CHARGE THE STAMPEDING CROWD WITH PALM BRANCHES, BATONS AND RIFLE BUTTS. SEVERAL SHOTS WERE FIRED IN THE AIR. IN THE ENSUING COMMOTION, MANY PEOPLE WERE INJURED, OF WHOM ABOUT

TEN RECEIVED MEDICAL TREATMENT AT ONANDJOKWE HOSPITAL IMMEDIATELY. PROPERTIES WERE DAMAGED, PEOPLE ROBBED, WHILE SWAPO T-SHIRTS AND SHIRTS WERE CONFISCATED. EVEN THE WOMEN COMRADES WITH SWAPO T-SHIRTS WERE UNDRESSED AT GUNPOINT AND OTHERS WERE LEFT ONLY IN PANTIES. IN THE LIGHT OF WHAT HAS HAPPENED AT OLUNO, COUPLED WITH THE EARLIER ABORTIVE CHARACTER ASSASSINATION

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OF THE SWAPO VICE-CHAIRMAN, DAN TJONGARERO, WE WISH TO REITERATE OUR STAND THAT NO FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS CAN BE HELD IN NAMIBIA WHILE THE RACIST S.A. ARMED FORCES ARE HERE. SWAPO OF NAMIBIA ONCE MORE REJECTS STRONGLY THE TRAINING OF TRIBAL ARMIES WHICH ARE BEING USED TO DO THE DIRTY WORK FOR THE OCCUPYING REGIME IN OUR MOTHERLAND. M. FORD ON BEHALF OF THE SWAPO EXECUTIVE. UNQUOTE.

4. JOHN VIALI AT THE ADMINISTRATOR GENERAL'S OFFICE REJECTED THE SWAPO VERSION OF THE MEETING. HE CONFIRMED TO US BY TELEPHONE THAT ARMY ROADBLOCKS DO OPERATE IN THE AREA, BUT SERIOUSLY DOUBTED THAT QUEUES OF CARS TWO

KILOMETERS LONG COULD HAVE RESULTED. HE SAID THAT THE MEETING WAS ATTENDED BY A MAXIMUM OF ONLY 800 PEOPLE, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MANY OF THEM FROM THE SOUTH RATHER THAN OVAMBO, AND THAT THE CROWD INCLUDED A LARGE ANTI-SWAPO CONTINGENT. ACCORDING TO VIAL, THE MEETING WENT SMOOTHLY UNTIL HENDRIK WITBOOI USED HIS SPEECH FOR A VIOLENT ATTACK ON CHIEFS AND HEADMEN, AT WHICH POINT CHAOS BROKE OUT AND MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE BEGAN TO FIGHT WITH FISTS AND STICKS. AT THIS POINT, THE POLICE INTERVENED AND FIRED 17 TEARGAS CANISTERS TO DISPERSE THE CROWD. MANY MEMBERS OF THE SCATTERING CROWD RAN TOWARD THE NEARBY HEADQUARTERS BUILDING OF THE OVAMBO BATTALION, AND OVAMBO SOLDIERS OUTSIDE THE BUILDING FIRED SHOTS INTO THE AIR. VIAL SAID THAT ORDER WAS SOON RESTORED AND THAT NO ONE WAS SERIOUSLY INJURED. HE CALLED SWAPO'S "DISTORTED" VERSION OF THE INCIDENT "TYPICAL OF SWAPO TACTIS".

5. THERE WERE NO PRESS REPORTERS AND TO OUR KNOWLEDGE NO OTHER INDEPENDENT SOURCES AT THE GATHERING. AS A RESULT, THE ACCURACY OF THE TWO VERSIONS IS HARD TO ASSESS. ONE RELIABLE REPORTER WHO WAS NOT PRESENT TOLD US THAT SHE WAS ABLE TO CONFIRM FROM GOOD SOURCES THAT THE CROWD AT THE MEETING WAS LESS THAN 1,000. SHE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT EVEN AN OVAMBO GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL SPOKESMAN TOLD HER THAT THE TROUBLE BEGAN WHEN ABOUT 20 TURNHALLE SUPPORTERS INFILTRATED THE CROWD AND STARTED ATTACKING PEOPLE AT RANDOM.

6. COMMENT: WE ARE UNLIKELY TO BE ABLE TO GET A DEFINITIVE ACCOUNT OF THE MEETING AND DISTURBANCE. IT APPEARS PROBABLY TO US THAT THE TRUTH LIES SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THE TWO VERSIONS. IN ANY EVENT, SWAPO CLEARLY INTENDS TO USE THE INCIDENT TO REINFORCE ITS POSITION THAT FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ARE IMPOSSIBLE WHILE SOUTH AFRICAN TROOPS REMAIN IN NAMIBIA.BOWDLER

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Approved on Date:
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